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Castlemaine Naturalist

April '98
243 Vol.22.3

Go Go Goshawk ????

Was there a goshawk - a *Grey* Goshawk - at the bottom of my garden???

One morning recently I was listening to Mozart, eating my breakfast and watching the White-winged Choughs foraging for theirs.

Suddenly there was disquiet among the choughs, the sort that usually heralds the approach of magpies. Sure enough, when I looked up I saw a large white bird fly past and settle in a eucalypt approximately ten metres from the house and less than three metres from the chough "lookout" perched in another tree. Both birds were directly in my line of vision.

Having quickly dispensed with the "magpie theory" I adopted the "Sulphur-crested Cockatoo theory". However, this large chunky bird had no crest. Since I have no binoculars the details of its description are a bit hazy. What I did notice was the feathery "pantaloons" on its upper legs and its strong yellow lower legs.

I was torn between trying to take in its details and observing the choughs' behaviour. The white bird and the chough lookout kept each other under surveillance for a minute or so whilst the rest of the choughts continued foraging. Then at an unseen (by me) signal the choughs, with tails tipping up and down and with wings spread in a fearsome pose, marched directly beneath the white bird, daring it to attack.

The choughs moved on to their next feeding point another ten metres away. The white bird followed and settled in another tree. As there was another family of choughs at this point a challenge for territory erupted. This probably should have given the white bird the opportunity to collect its breakfast. But, instead, it flew off.

I then perused my Slaters field guide, looking for a match for this

large white bird. The only one which seemed to fit the descriptive and locality criteria was a Grey Goshawk. When I checked numerous bird sightings in back editions of the newsletter, only one sighting of a Grey Goshawk was listed - that was in the Kerang area. (One was seen by the birdos at the Gannawarra BOCA camp. Ed.)

So, could someone please tell me - *was* there a Goshawk at the bottom of my garden - a *Grey* Goshawk - perhaps a Mozart-loving Grey Goshawk!!??

Natalie de Maccus

p.s. Natalie has now invested in a pair of binoculars after this incident! Ed.

Roadside Work at Faraday

Our property of 100 acres has a 2+ km frontage to McKittericks Road. This lane runs off the Faraday-Sutton Grange road, winds down the Mount Alexander South Gap ridge to a granite sheet (Upper Myrtle Creek crossing) and meanders through lower and, in winter, soggy, flatter land. Since about 1985 we have worked hard to eradicate roadside rabbits, destroy warrens and control gorse and blackberry, preparatory to more intensive appropriate planting, etc. Part of the work involved many long and bitter hours clearing the fallen timber of decades so that we could have access for continuing effective gorse and rabbit control (on the principle that until these pests were almost non-existent, young natural regrowth and plantings were doomed), and to reduce the possible fire intensity.

The idea is to develop a viable habitat corridor from the Mount Alexander Regional Park, linking eventually with water channel enclosures and stream and other revegetation (fenced) areas, The roadside vegetation is predominently Candlebark, box and Manna Gums, Black Wattle, Lightwood and Blackwood with weedy ground cover, but with some areas of wildflowers, orchids, native grasses and the sedge, Gahnia radula.

Inside our boundary fence we are developing a vegetation belt, direct seeded from local trees and shrubs, and we hope for natural revegetation. In parts this is now going well and the bird life has been noticably enhanced. Our new neighbours along McKittericks Road are very keen to work on creek fencing, rabbit and gorse/blackberry work and they plan to have an internal revegetation area right round their boundary. Normally we clear windfall trees and branches and trim where really necessary to allow vehicle access, and we use hand tools to try to reduce the effect of gullies forming on the road and eroding the track.

The roadsides are not perfect and we have much work to do to eventually change the ground cover in places from undesirable weeds, and instead to have healthy young growth developing to replace and complement the mature stressed trees and shrubs.

In the past the Shire's road work was limited to an occasional grader pass, with a few run-off areas on the roadside, and fill on some boggy areas so they did not close the road throughout the whole of the winter. The lane has a very low traffic density, but access for emergency and farm vehicles is necessary.

Early on Friday February 27 the road was checked for wind damage from the bluster on the previous evening and there was relief that there was nothing requiring urgent attention. We had our hands full clearing huge fallen branches on the property. We became aware of the Shire tractor in the road, and upon enquiry, I was told that it was to clear the overhanging branches and edges to allow access for the grader and gravel truck which would follow to "upgrade" the roads - McKittericks, Burgoynes and Dainty's. I was happy about this because I *(naively)* believed a better job would be done lopping than we can do. I had grave reservations about the usefulness of the gravel being brought in "so that the grader has something to grade"! Our experience has been that gravel just makes the road more slippery and the basic problem of poor drainage is not addressed. Also there is the risk of importing weed seeds - we have enough of our own.

I *(foolishly)* did not inspect what had been done by the tractor prior to my conversation with the driver, but went home and was busy all day, aware that the tractor was working, but not listening for the sound of a saw. *(Another mistake!).* When we did drive down the lane about 5 pm we were stunned to find that apparently the back hoe bucket etc. had been used to belt and wrench the branches and trees as the "lopping" operation. The result was ragged stubs, torn trunks and stripped bark. Debris had been pushed across the roadsides so that, in parts, the ground cover (grasses, weeds and wildflower plants, etc.) was torn out. Young wattles, marked by tyres, were shoved aside and part covered in dirt. We knew that some trees, on the very edge of the road, would have to be removed, but curiously some have been left intact while trees **much** further from the track centre have suffered damage. Our immediate reaction was to figure out how to stop the tractor's progress on the following Monday. (Luckily it turned out to be a rostered day off for the driver!) Over the weekend I contacted our local Councillor, and our neighbour further down the road whose land borders on Dainty's Lane and McKittericks Road *(and who happened to be the Mayor.)*

Throughout the week, a truck and tractor and three workers were involved in cutting and carting off debris. *(We were not successful in our negotiations that the debris should be shredded on site.)* Some branch stubs have been trimmed. The horticulturist has visited. The Shire's Group Manager, Technical Operations has made a number of visits. **It has been an expensive week for the Shire!** When I spoke to the three workers, (who had had their "talking to"), one claimed that their Roadsides Conservation training of 2 days was "just an introduction", one said "they tell us to do stuff and we just have to go and do it", and the tractor driver in question was of the opinion that it was all a vast overreaction and they were only "shitty old Black Wattles anyway"!!!!!! He has claimed that he had pressure on him to save Shire money, and he had tried to do just that. I am told the Union also became involved. There has been support from the Shire C.E.O. and I have had positive contact with the State Roadsides Conservation Ecology Officer involved in organising the training.

The Current outcome is that I am assured by the Technical Operations Group Manager that -

a. The policy will now be changed so that such work will be initially inspected by a horticulturist and that "specialists" will be involved in the practical work.

b. Work will be undertaken to restore the roadsides damaged on the 27th including the planting of native grasses on the sites where soil was "rearranged". These will be negotiated so that we can give long term care.

c. That a full report (with photos) will be presented to the Shire Council at the next meeting.

Our local councillor has taken the matter up and will present it formally at the next Council meeting.

I am still pressuring for the urgent publication of the Shire's Roadside Management Strategy document - a draft which around in November was incomplete and did not include sections including the work of the surveys and the consequent conservation status of the Shire's roads (much of the work completed by Ern Perkins).

Most of all, I realize that **constant vigilance is required to prevent a repetition or variation of such events** in the future. Because I knew there was a Roadside Management Plan, that its requirements should be in all contracts, and that workers should all have had training, I presumed tha roadside was in safe hands. However, the message is, if work is going on around you, please keep a wary eye on it, and report immediately, both through your Councillor and direct to the Shire office, any inappropriate practice. **It is also important to report good practice,**

so that workers can feel they are on target and that their work is important and their efforts appreciated, and so that we are not seen as being mere agitators.

Margaret Hunter, 13/3/98

EUROPEAN WASPS

I have been asked to publish the method by which I have been destroying European Wasps. I had not been able to discover the nests, and have found that it is impossible to follow insects that fly up and over shrubs, fences, etc. (I've now discovered that I can locate a nest by looking for the insects flying in the late afternoon sun.)

Last year I read that one way to destroy a nest was to put Baygon dust at the entrance where the workers landed, so that it would be carried in to the queen, and once the queen dies the nest dies. In desperation I set up a trap that ensured that foraging wasps would tramp in the powder as they cut bits out of tinned cat food and carry food and powder back to the nest. I found that after having a positive swarm of wasps one day, numbers were down to twenty or so next day and I didn't see any wasps again last season - that was in late April.

I have now improved on my first efforts and find that this trap has worked best -

Materials -

1/ A 2l fruit juice bottle, clean and dry, as is,
or a 2.25 PET soft drink bottle, clean and dry, with the top cut off about 1cm down from the neck.

2/ Several puffs of the Baygon dust down into the base of the bottle

3/ A walnut sized cube of raw pet meat (not mince) or tinned cat food pushed through and dropped on top of the powder - I suspect the smell of it around the top attracts the wasps first.

4/ An old terracotta plant pot or something similar to stand the bottle in.

DO NOT use anything sweet to attract them

MAKE SURE the bottle can't be tipped over and that children and pets can't get at the contents

REPLENISH if and as necessary

TAKE CARE when handling the powder, which must be one specific for wasps, and follow safety procedures.

DNRE have a good pamphlet, Living with Euopean Wasps, available at the Hargreaves St. office.

Rita Mills

Observations

* On March 6 at Yapeen, high above the trees and house in swirling wind, approximately 30 White-throated Needletails were wheeling and diving, mostly high up in the thermals, but occasionally skimming the treetops - a first-sighting for Margaret Badminton.
* On the U3A walk to Breakneck Gorge near Hepburn Springs, Stan Bruton was intrigued with a plant that had a large rhubarb-like leaf and a thistle-like head. He found that it stuck tenaciously to his fingers, and under magnification the plant was found to have transparent curved hairs. Sally Thompson was able to identify it as Common Burdock. They are growing a few plants for interest's sake. It may be grown as a non-fruiting crop in Victoria, i.e. the flower heads must be removed, but is banned in N.S.W. The root is grown for medicinal purposes.
* Stan also reported hearing a falcon giving a whistling call near the Camp Reserve and wonders if it is an immature of the local Hobby.
* Another report of a Black Kite comes from near the corner of North Street and Blakeley Road at the beginning of March. Rita Mills
* Margaret Willis opened her door to let the cat back in, and a small long eared bat took up the invitation, too! She finally caught it under a jar while it hung from a beam, and let it go out into the night again.
* George Broadway usually has several raptors, including a Hobby, around his place, but they have been absent lately, but three Little Eagles soared in on a front in late February or early March.
* Sally Thompson reported that she has a baby Blue-tongue at her place at Ravenswood. It seems to be Blue-tongue baby time.
* Brenda Envall was amazed recently to see a young Wedgetailed Eagle land on the childrens' basketball ring in the garden of a friends place at Ravenswood. It had been around for a few days, and had earlier been circling the poor little dog which she reported a few months ago was chased by the Black Kite which has taken up residence at Ravenswood!
* Ann van Gemert has lots of Crimson and Eastern Rosellas at her place at Taradale, but she has friends at Glenlyon who are in danger of losing their whole commercial crop of walnuts, hazelnuts and chestnuts to a virtual plague of rosellas and cockatoos.
* Shirley Parnably reports that it has been a good summer for Dingy Swallowtail Butterflies, and her potted cumquat was visited many times. As a result there were so many caterpillars chomping away at the foliage that she had to consider a "cull" in the interests of the tree. She was saved the trouble by a really cold night of 3°C in February and, regrettably, not a caterpillar survived.
* Shirley also tells of the half-grown Blue-tongued Lizard living in the garden. It has been observed patrolling the area under the vines and eating a few grapes which have fallen while the birds were feasting.
* Maggie Oliver has had the pleasure of the company of five Blue Wrens in her garden for quite some time. The main attraction for them seems to be the hose.

* Margaret Badminton has had a juvenile Red-capped Robin coming and going at her place at Yapeen since Mar. 23. Red-capped Robins were first observed by Club members toward the end of the 1982 drought, and one or two families were regularly seen at Barkers Creek from then on. This is a first for Yapeen.

* After he set up the original version of "the patent soft-drink bottle wasp trap" at the end of the last season the hundreds of European Wasps invading George Broadway's bird bath disappeared. This year he hasn't had a wasp problem, but the dozens of bees are back - and much more welcome.

Several of the Committee reported that they have had fewer wasps around and they have also seen more bees this year. Rita Mills reported having seen both bees and blowflies being stung to death by the European Wasps. The bees were at the water dish, and the blowfies were on dog turds that the wasps were cutting up and carting back to the nest. They seem to be less inclined to be "sweet tooths" here than in Europe. Has anyone else noted this?

GREAT DIVIDING TRAIL PUBLIC WALK

Sat. April 18. Mt. Franklin to Daylesford. Rating easy-medium. Expected time 6-7 hours. Leader Pam Manning. Meet at Mt Franklin Crater in time to leave at 9am. Wear suitable clothing and footwear, carry water, lunch and snacks.

If you wish to go you *must* ring Pam on 5348 3200 at least 4 days before hand so that car shuffles and any special arrangements can be made.

Project Paw

Our help is needed by Project Pest Animal Watch (PAW) in reporting feral goats and feral pigs DURING THE MONTH OF APRIL. If possible the name of the town, road intersection, road/river intersection or grid reference nearest the sighting should be given.

There is quite a number of other questions to be answered (how many animals, how long you were looking/hunting for them etc.) and the club does have a sheet which can be photcopied if you wish to take part in this survey, or you can write direct to Project PAW

Victoria's Pest Animal Watch
Victorian Institute of
Agricultural Sciences
475 - 485 Mickleham Road
Attwood, Vic., 3049.

DNRE will analyse and store the information collected and provide the results back to your hunting(!), conservation, community, Landcare organisations and to the participating publications/magazines.

C.F.N.C. PROGRAMME

General Meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall, at 8.00 pm on the second Friday of each month, except January. Entrances to the car parks are beside the Art Gallery and beside the Church building in Lyttleton Street.
Excursions leave promptly at times stated, usually on the Saturday after the general meeting. There are NO excursions on TOTAL FIRE BAN days.
Business Meetings are held at 38 Campbell Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30pm. All members are invited to attend.

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THE APRIL MEETING AND EXCURSION ARE PART OF THE HERITAGE WEEK PROGRAM, AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC ARE INVITED TO JOIN US ON BOTH OCCASIONS. NOTE THAT BOTH HAVE BEEN BEEN BROUGHT FORWARD 1 WEEK TO THE FIRST WEEK IN APRIL.

Fri Apr. 3 **Geology and Landscape of the Castlemaine District** and its influence on the vegetation. Speaker is E. Perkins. 8pm, UCA hall.

Sat Apr. 4 **Pennyweight Flat/Kalimna Walking Trail**, 8km circuit. Leave Victory Park at 1.30pm and return at approx. 4.30 pm. There will be a small charge of $2. A picnic afternoon tea, provided by the club, will be served at Kalimna Point on the way back. Leader is E. Perkins.

Fri. May 8 **Non-flowering Plants.** Speaker is Gary Cheers of Maryborough FNC. 8pm, UCA hall.

Sat May 9 **Muckleford Forest Plant Communities.** In The club's submission to the Environment Conservation Council, we identified some of the vegetation associations in Muckleford forest. On this excursion we will visit some of those associations. Leader is E. Perkins. Leave 13 Mostyn St. at 1.30 pm sharp.

Fri June 12 **Terrick-Terrick; Flora, Grasslands and the Plains Wanderer.** Speaker is Shirley Diez, Flora Planner for DNRE. 8pm, UCA hall.

Sat June 13. **Firth Park, Trentham East.** Leave 27 Doveton St. 11am. Take lunch and afternoon tea.

Fri 11 to Sun. 13 Sept. **Field Naturalists Get-together at Castlemaine.** Put this weekend on your calendar now. If you can help in any way please let the secretary know. Speakers for the weekend are :-
Friday - John Landy and
Saturday- Dr Tim Entwisle of the Melbourne Herbarium

Fri. 16 to Sun 18 Oct. **V.F.N.C.A. Campout at Mildura.**

* *

Committee; G. Broadway (Pres.), M. Dredge (V.P.), B. Maund (Sec.), M. Badminton (Treas.), R. Mills (N/L Ed. and P.O.), John Turnbull, M. Oliver, C. Morris, K. Turner.

Subscriptions - Ordinary membership: Single $16, Family $24
Pensioner/student: Single $12, Family $18 Supporting : $25
Newsletter posted: Membership + $6.

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